

Prevention is Still the Best Medicine

‘Child Health Day’ Finds Utah Kids Healthy, But Could Be Better

(Salt Lake City, UT) – October 1 is National Child Health Day. This year’s theme—Build a Bright Future Through Preventive Health—has long been the battle plan for the Utah Department of Health (UDOH) and other child health and welfare agencies.

The state’s prevention successes are seen in several areas, including;

- **A growing child immunization rate.** A new report ranked Utah 20th best in the nation in 2006 for the percentage of children ages birth to 2 who are fully vaccinated. That’s up from 41st place in 2005. Among adolescents entering 7th grade, a Utah survey shows approximately 95% reported immunization levels above 95% for all required vaccinations (Tdap or Td, hepatitis B and varicella) for the 2006-2007 school year.
- **Child obesity rates.** Utah is leading an effort to reduce the obesity rate among children by engaging with community partners to identify strategies to promote physical activity and healthy eating. Nearly one in four Utah elementary children (23%) is overweight or obese. Seventeen percent of Utah teens in grades 9-12 are overweight or obese, compared to the U.S. rate of 29%.
- **A low teen tobacco smoking rate** of 7.4%, while 23% of teens nationally smoke.
- **A low teen alcohol use rate**, with 15% reporting being current drinkers, compared to 43% nationally. (For more information about teen health topics, visit <http://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/yrbs/index.htm>).
- **Early childhood screenings.** Utah receives funds from the national Health Resources and Services Administration that support efforts to promote early screening for developmental and social/emotional delays in young children. The screenings help providers and parents get referrals for further assessment of delays. Early screenings reduce the potential for problems later in childhood.

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There is still more work to be done, however. Challenges in children's health include:

- **Reducing the number of uninsured children.** Despite expansion of the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), each year more working families look to the state for help with medical coverage.
- **Addressing mental health issues.** The 2006 Youth Risk Behavior Survey found that more than 28% of Utah youth reporting feeling so sad or hopeless that they stopped doing some usual activities.
- **Reducing injury-related deaths.** Motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death for Utah teens ages 15-19. Each year, motor vehicle crashes account for an average of 40 deaths, 330 hospitalizations, and 5,400 emergency department visits for Utah teens ages 15-19. In 2006, the UDOH and all 12 local health departments began a coordinated statewide campaign to increase teen seatbelt use and are currently promoting program the national "Don't Drive Stupid" (www.dontdrivestupid.com) safety initiative.

"As a state, we encourage everyone to get involved in improving the health of our youth," said Linda Abel, UDOH health program manager. "This means making sure children's vaccinations are up-to-date, teaching teens the importance of responsible driving, and supporting schools to teach health and nutrition and keeping students physically active to reduce childhood obesity," she said. "Together we can make a difference for our children."

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The mission of the Utah Department of Health is to protect the public's health through preventing avoidable illness, injury, disability and premature death, assuring access to affordable, quality health care, and promoting healthy lifestyles.